



U.S.S. LEXINGTON (AVT-16)
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AVT16:17:jps
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1 4 FEB 1980

From: Commanding Officer, USS LEXINGTON (AVT 16)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-05D2)
Subj: Command History (1 January to 31 December 1979); submission of
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5720.12B
Encl: (1) Command History
(2) Pertinent Press Clippings

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) and (2) are submitted as this command's annual history record of 1979.

P. E. JOHNSON

Copy to:
Director of Naval History (OP-09BH)
CINCLANTFLT
COMNAVAIRLANT

BASIC HISTORY

(1) Command History

Commanding Officer

Captain Philip E. Johnson

30 November 1978-

LEXINGTON is homeported at the Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida and is the Training Carrier for basic, advanced and fleet pilot carrier qualifications. LEXINGTON is under the operational control of the Chief of Naval Air Training and the administrative control of the Commander U.S. Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

As of 31 December 1979, LEXINGTON is presently temporarily homeported in the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard where the ship is undergoing a scheduled seven month overhaul.

(2) Summary of Operations

On 9 January 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by Congressman Elect Earl Hutto and his Military Affairs Assistant. Congressman Hutto was accompanied by Captain Johnson on a tour of the ship.

On 11 January 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by the Commanding Officer of USCG PONTE VERDE.

On 11-18 February 1979, LEXINGTON took part in Black History Week. Special literature was displayed in the ship's library and several historical awareness programs were conducted.

On 16 February 1979, ceremonies were held for Command Master Chief McKerley upon his transfer from LEXINGTON. During the ceremony Master Chief McKerley was designated as LEXINGTON's first Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist. Master Chief McKerley was relieved as Command Master Chief by Master Chief Villo, formerly Chief Master at Arms.

On 17 February 1979, LEXINGTON celebrated her 36th birthday with a traditional cake cutting ceremony.

On 22 February 1979, Operations Specialist Seaman Johnny L. Lett was reported missing as the ship transitted back to its homeport of Pensacola, Florida after conducting carrier qualifications in the Gulf of Mexico. LEXINGTON conducted search and rescue operations, using three plane guard helicopters, while backtracking her course. The Coast Guard later arrived and assumed the task of On-Scene-Commander. LEXINGTON returned to Pensacola.

On 23 February 1979, the search for OSSN Lett was officially terminated, his remains or evidence of his whereabouts were not discovered.

On 8 March 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by the Inter-American Defense Group for a tour of the ship.

(Enclosure 1)

On 17 March 1979, World War II crewmembers of the USS MONTEREY held a reunion on LEXINGTON in Pensacola, Florida.

On 28-29 March 1979, Tom Fox, journalist for Channel 2 in Houston, Texas, flew aboard LEXINGTON during a routine five day at-sea period. He made films of flight operations and conducted interviews with several crewmembers from the Houston area.

On 3 April 1979, Jim Douglas, journalist for WHIO, Channel 7 in Ohio, flew aboard LEXINGTON during a routine five day at-sea period. He took films and interviewed crewmembers from the Ohio area.

On 6 April 1979, upon completion of a successful at-sea period LEXINGTON got underway for a port call at Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Upon her arrival at Fort Lauderdale on 8 April, LEXINGTON was greeted by a high school band and a small flotilla of private boats.

On 10 April 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by the Fort Lauderdale Navy League Council of 100. The council presented Captain Johnson with a plaque, welcoming LEXINGTON to Fort Lauderdale.

On 11 April 1979, LEXINGTON departed Fort Lauderdale, Florida and transitted back to her homeport of Pensacola, Florida, arriving 13 April.

On 15 April 1979, Easter Sunrise Services were held on LEXINGTON's flight deck. The service was attended by over 1000 people, including several Pensacola dignitaries.

On 20 April 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by the Judge Advocate General and members of the American Bar Association. They were met by Captain Johnson who accompanied them on a tour of the ship and a meeting with the LEXINGTON Legal Officers.

On 26 April 1979, Operations Specialist Seaman Johnny L. Lett was officially declared deceased.

On 2 May 1979, the Dallas Military Affairs Committee and the Dallas Chamber of Commerce flew onboard LEXINGTON during a routine five day at-sea period. The two groups toured the ship and flew off the same day.

On 5 May 1979, LEXINGTON began participation in the Navy's Midshipman Summer Training program. For the first time in LEXINGTON's history, female midshipmen underwent training during this period.

On 15 May 1979, Liz Swain, reporter for a local Pensacola TV station, WEAR, visited LEXINGTON to film and gather information for a three part mini-series about LEXINGTON. The topic was LEXINGTON's past, present and future and her impact on Pensacola's economy. The feature was aired on WEAR's Channel 3 evening news May 17, 18 and 19.

On 19 May 1979, LEXINGTON provided a signal flag exhibit to a local shopping mall in observance of Armed Forces Day.

On 20 May 1979, LEXINGTON held memorial services in the Hangar Bay for Operations Specialist Seaman Johnny L. Lett.

On 24 June 1979, the King Neptune Sea Explorers held their annual rendezvous ceremony on LEXINGTON's flight deck. Captain Johnson hosted the Explorers and participated in the religious/awards ceremony.

On 6 July 1979, LEXINGTON held her annual Dependent's Day Cruise. The ship departed NAS Pensacola for the Gulf where flight operations were conducted under the observation of over 1100 dependents and guests. Lunch was served on the Hangar Bay. The ship returned to NAS Pensacola at 1630 the same day.

On 15 July 1979, LT Richard S. Harrison, USNR (Ret.), a Plankowner of LEXINGTON's predecessor, CV-2, boarded LEXINGTON to accompany the ship on a routine five day at-sea period. While onboard LT Harrison appeared on WLEX, the ship's Closed Circuit Television Station and described life in the "Old Navy" and his adventures during World War II. Especially interesting to the crew was his account of the sinking of CV-2 during the battle of the Coral Sea, of which he is a survivor.

On 17 July 1979, LT Spruill of VRC-40, Fleet Logistics Support Squadron, stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, made the first CIA carrier landing by a female on LEXINGTON.

On 27 and 28 July 1979, LEXINGTON held her annual gala ship's picnic at the Barrancas Beach House on NAS Pensacola. Food, beverages, entertainment and games were provided for crewmembers and their dependents.

On 17 August 1979, LEXINGTON hosted a Civilian Orientation Cruise. About 800 guests were taken out to sea for a day. Flight operations were conducted and the guests were allowed to view them from the observation deck.

On 23 August 1979, while LEXINGTON was conducting routine flight operations in the Gulf of Mexico an A7 jet aircraft from Attack Squadron 204, stationed at New Orleans, crashed into the water after launch. The pilot ejected and was recovered by the plane guard helo. The pilot suffered a cracked vertebra but was otherwise not seriously injured. The aircraft was lost.

On 28 August 1979, while LEXINGTON was conducting routine flight operations in the Gulf of Mexico, a flight deck crewman slipped and fell overboard. He was immediately rescued by the plane guard helo and returned onboard. The crewmember suffered no serious injury.

On 5 and 6 September 1979, a team of members from the PENJERDEL (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware) organization, representing the city of Philadelphia, visited LEXINGTON and gave a presentation on the Philadelphia area. The presentation included a slide show and informative lectures on housing, state laws, entertainment and other items of interest to LEXINGTON's crewmembers.

On 11 September 1979, LEXINGTON effected a personnel recall and got underway in order to avoid Hurricane Fredric, which was then approximately 300 miles away in the Gulf.

On 12 September 1979, LEXINGTON, underway in the Gulf, experienced very heavy seas due to Hurricane Fredric, which was then moving over the coasts of Pensacola, Florida and Mobile, Alabama with winds up to 130 miles per hour.

On 13 September 1979, LEXINGTON returned to NAS Pensacola to find that the channel bouys had been shifted and the range markers were destroyed by the hurricane. Using a hovering helicopter equipped with a spotlight for a range marker LEXINGTON successfully navigated the channel into Pensacola Bay. Even though Allegheny Pier had been damaged by the hurricane LEXINGTON was able to moor in the normal manner.

On 14 September 1979, President Carter flew into Sherman Field at NAS Pensacola to view hurricane damage to the Gulf Coast.

On 17 September 1979, while conducting routine at-sea operations off the coast of Corpus Christi, Texas, LEXINGTON was forced to change course to conduct operations off Key West, Florida due to the location of Hurricane Henri in the Gulf.

On 5 October 1979, Captain Johnson granted holiday routine for the ship's 100% participation in the Combined Federal Campaign.

On 12 October 1979, LEXINGTON got underway for her temporary homeport of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for a scheduled seven month overhaul. Prior to departure, the Chief of Naval Education and Training boarded the ship for a brief visit with the Captain. Two civilian journalists from Navy Times and the Pensacola News-Journal were embarked to give news coverage of the voyage. Also embarked were over 40 dependents along with their household goods and over 350 automobiles.

On 16 October 1979, as LEXINGTON began to transit the Delaware River, a large group of Philadelphia area journalists flew out to the ship via two Army helos. While onboard, the journalists interviewed crewmembers and took films for television. Upon arrival at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, LEXINGTON was met by Coast Guard and harbor fireboats. Playing on the pier was a high school band from Clairmont High School of Clairmont, Delaware.

On 17 October 1979, LEXINGTON was backed into drydock number four. The water was drained from the drydock and yardworkers immediately began work on the ship.

On 23 October 1979, Frank Rizzo, Mayor of Philadelphia, hosted a reception for 135 officers and enlisted men from LEXINGTON at the Fairmont Hotel in Philadelphia. Also on 23 October, Admiral Brettschneider, Commandant, Fourth Naval District, visited LEXINGTON and had lunch with Captain Johnson.

On 6 November 1979, LEXINGTON was visited by Captain Dibble, USNR, (Ret.), for a tour of the ship. Captain Dibble was Commanding Officer of VS-936, Air Group 9 during World War II onboard LEXINGTON. His squadron made one of the first carrier air strikes against Tokyo, Japan near the close of the war.

On 9 November 1979, LEXINGTON's enlisted crewmembers moved off the ship into temporary living quarters.

LEXINGTON's Public Relations role continued extensively during 1979. The total number of casual, inport visitors was about 30,000, evidence that LEXINGTON is still a major Gulf Coast tourist attraction. LEXINGTON also hosted over 2500 guests at sea, not including the dependents and guests that came aboard for the Dependent's Day Cruise. These guests included participants in the Civilian Orientation Cruises, Allied Officers, educators, media representatives, judges, Navy League Members, Naval Sea Cadets, NROTC and Naval Academy Midshipmen and prospective recruits, both officer and enlisted.

In 1979 LEXINGTON continued to be a vital part of Naval Aviator training. During flight operations conducted off Pensacola, Florida and Corpus Christi, Texas, LEXINGTON completed 4831 arrested landings (1123 at night) with fleet squadron pilots, and 4970 arrested landings with student pilots, successfully accomplishing her primary mission as the Navy's only Training Carrier. LEXINGTON also conducted helo operations, amassing a total of 1300 landings.

During 1979 LEXINGTON was underway for a total of 90 days in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.